

# Facts & Information

August 2000

## Pipeline Safety

The Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) is responsible for developing and enforcing safety standards for natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines located completely within the state. The UTC also inspects the portion of interstate natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines located within Washington State, but in this case the standards and enforcement actions are the responsibility of the federal Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS). This document will answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the UTC's pipeline safety program.

### How long has the state had a pipeline safety program?

The UTC has had a successful gas pipeline safety program since 1955 and a hazardous liquid pipeline safety program since 1996. This year, with the approval of the state legislature and the federal OPS, the state program was expanded to allow the UTC to inspect interstate pipelines during construction, operation, and after incidents. In some cases UTC and OPS staff may conduct joint inspections.

### Why do we need a state program as well as a federal program?

Gaining state authority to inspect interstate pipelines was a key recommendation of the Governor's Fuel Accident Prevention and Response Task Force. The expanded state role will lead to more pipeline inspections and to improved follow-up on safety issues, including those found in a recent inspection of all interstate pipelines. The federal program is not staffed to provide this level of service, with one inspector assigned to Washington State. In contrast, the state program is authorized to have 10 inspectors by the end of 2000. Also, state inspectors will develop ongoing expertise with pipeline facilities and operators, develop expertise with local conditions, and be more responsive to the concerns of local citizens and governments.

### How many miles of pipelines are in the state?

There are currently 17,250 miles of natural gas pipelines and 83 miles of hazardous liquid pipelines located completely within the state. There are 1,732 miles of interstate natural gas pipelines and 777 miles of interstate hazardous liquid pipelines.



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## **How does the UTC conduct inspections?**

We conduct two types of inspections. Field inspections involve physical testing and visual inspection of pipeline facilities. Audit inspections review the records maintained by a pipeline company to make sure that scheduled maintenance is being performed and that operator training and certification is current. Both types of inspections are essential to a comprehensive pipeline safety program. Major pipelines are scheduled to be inspected at least annually.

## **What happens if the UTC finds problems with a pipeline?**

It depends on the nature of the problem and whether the pipeline is located completely within the state or interstate. For pipelines within the state, the UTC can take enforcement action if a problem is identified and not corrected. For interstate pipelines, the UTC will report inspection results to the federal Office of Pipeline Safety. OPS will have 90 days from the state report to start an enforcement action, seek additional information, notify the state of any delay in enforcement, or decline to take action.

## **Will the state receive enforcement authority for interstate pipelines?**

Expanded state enforcement authority will require federal legislation. Congress is currently reviewing the federal OPS. As part of that process, Washington State has proposed an expanded state enforcement role, as well as additional federal funds for inspection and enforcement.

## **Does the UTC deal with more than inspection and enforcement?**

Yes. A key element of the UTC pipeline safety program is preventing pipeline damage, particularly through developing and distributing a training program for contractors and improving the state's "Call Before You Dig" system. The program will also include a citizens advisory committee to advise state, federal, and local agencies on pipeline safety issues.

## **How is the program funded?**

A mix of federal and state funds currently fund the program. The UTC has been directed to develop recommendations for long-term funding of the program.

## **Who do I contact for more information?**

If you have questions about the UTC's Pipeline Safety program, please contact the Director of Pipeline Safety at 360-664-1160.

